



## **The Sleeper by MaethoMixup**

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**Summary:** The world is conspiring against Steve, and he handles it the best way he knows how: with a bat. The story of heartbreak, monsters, and an asshole that won't let him brood alone. Canon Compliant.

# The Sleeper

**Disclaimer:** Don't own.

**Warnings:** Violence, mature language, more to come

**A/N:** Feeling motivated, and I love this pairing! I wish there was more for them! I'll update soon, so please let me know what you think. :)

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By MaethoMixup

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### A Fool in Love

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Steve knew enough about relationships to know when one was over.

It was the first time he had ever been dumped, but seeing his girlfriend holding another man's hand definitely meant he was single. The pain wasn't as bad as he thought it would be. He didn't cry, he didn't yell. There was a distinct lack of anything and maybe that was the most worrisome of the three options. If Dustin was to be believed, it was damned freaky that he wasn't permanently folded into a dark corner while he reminisced about the good ole days with Nancy.

And there were good memories of her, he was sure, but at the moment he could neither remember them nor did he have the desire to try. When he thought of her, it was with the same interest he held for his American History classes. Which is to say, not much and quickly forgotten before it gave him a headache.

It didn't feel right, feeling this way, but there wasn't any sense of wrongness to his detachment. So he continued on with his life, one slow step at a time, until Billy fucking Hargrove decided today was

the day to say hello as nicely as he possibly could.

"Hey, fuckface!"

Steve spun around with half a sandwich hanging from his mouth. He was sitting outside on one of the school's benches, attempting to eat his lunch in peace and Billy, in all his denim glory, was not what he would call a soothing presence. Or even a welcomed one.

He stood in front of him glaring, which was only surprising because of how close he was. Anything less than half a mile was too little and if he never saw Billy again that would be a blessing.

"You want something?" Steve asked after quickly swallowing his food. His legs tensed, ready to stand if threatened. To run or fight though, he wasn't sure. He may have technically won their last fight, but he was under no illusions of being able to do so again without the dork brigade helping him.

Which was pathetic, he thought. How had it gotten to the point where he was relying on kids to back him up?

"No," Billy finally responded, shuffling from foot to foot and glancing around as if searching for bystanders. Steve understood. He wouldn't want to be seen with himself either after the Nancy drama had been exposed to Hawkins' best and gossipiest. It was why he was out here, alone, instead of in the cafeteria with his old friends.

"Yes," Billy clarified after seeing that they were the only two people stupid enough to brave November's cold.

"Yes or no? Can't be both."

"Step off, Harrington," he snarled out. Billy moved forward with clenched fists, but stopped himself before Steve had time to react. His boot floated over the grass, frozen in an aborted stomp. A cross between indecision and anger twisted his expression into a scowl so deep it looked like he was constipated.

He let out a harsh puff of air, deflating. His foot dropped and his hand reached into his coat pocket. Steve's life flashed by. This was it. This is how he was going to die: stabbed to death by a crazy man and

left to rot in front of his high school only a few months from graduation.

Except instead of a knife, Billy pulled out an apple and tossed it to him. Steve caught it easily, wide eyed.

"You look like shit," he explained and stood there awkwardly as if his statement was suppose to do more than freak Steve the fuck out. The longer the silence stretched, the more Billy's gaze hardened, until his patience broke. An insult was growled out before he swiveled away with his hands stuffed angrily into his jacket.

And Steve just stared at his retreating back, because the alternative was to look at the apple and he wasn't sure which of the two were weirder. When Billy slung open the entrance doors and stalked back inside, his options dwindled to one. He peeked down at the fruit. It looked innocent, but his mom had forced him to sit through enough Snow White reruns to know better. The movie had taught him about the magic of first kisses, and that pretty and red could also mean deadly and poisoned.

Steve wasn't afraid of potentially lethal fruits though. After his bat had met the rotting flesh of a horror flick monster *that shouldn't exist*, this new challenge seemed like a walk in the park.

He sniffed it. It smelled like an apple.

His frown worsened. If this was Billy's shitty way to say, "I'm sorry for busting your face open and screwing up the weird, kind of cool babysitting thing you had going for you," then Steve wasn't impressed. Food wouldn't heal the bruises he still had even two weeks after their fight. The only consolation was knowing that Billy was still recovering too; his face was still scabbed.

He lifted the apple to his lips, opened his mouth, and then set it down on the bench without taking a bite. He wasn't scared, but if he was going to die, it was going to be in a blaze of glory rather than fainting like a Disney princess.

He eyed it suspiciously until the bell signalled that it was time to go back to class. It and his packed lunch were left forgotten as he

slouched inside.

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Billy had been a constant presence ever since his transfer date, but Steve became irritatingly aware of how often they passed each other in the halls despite only having one class together. He blamed the apple for this. Whether or not it was poisoned didn't matter anymore, it was the fact that Billy had gone out of his way to give it to him that had Steve curious.

If it was to kill him, then his motive was clear: revenge was best served sweet. However, Steve was starting to suspect that assumption was more a product of his imagination rather than rooted in reality. Billy was the type of man to punch first, plan later. Premeditated murder didn't seem his style.

Actually, he didn't know if that statement was true. They had played basketball together before Steve recently quit, but besides a handful of insults and their ill timed brawl, they were as good as strangers.

Strangers who despised each other. Totally normal.

His fingers danced through his hair nervously. He didn't know what motivations Billy had for the goodwill gesture, but he was sure it came from bad intentions. Self-centered people rarely went out of their way to cheer up another person. Not that it had brightened his day or anything. That would be stupid.

Fuck. Steve *was* stupid. There was a reason he and Nancy had worked so well together. She was the brain and he was the muscle there to bolster her plans, or at least protect her when they went to shit.

Except, that wasn't right either. He kicked his feet up on the desk and rested his head against the top tail of his chair.

They were over. From her perspective, Jonathan Byer was a better fit for her than Steve ever was and damn did it hurt to realize *that* truth.

So he pushed that thought away and obediently set his legs back down when his teacher paused his lesson to yell about his attitude. His classmates laughed all around him.

It took thirty more minutes of boredom before Steve decided that he hated biology almost as much as he hated Billy.

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Days and too many failed tests later, Steve was in a dilemma of world ending proportions- again. No one else would agree with his interpretation, but no one else had dated Nancy Wheeler.

Except for Jonathan, and that was the problem.

Steve stood on the far side of the parking lot, keys in hand and trying to go home. His car was near the bike racks and an easy walk from here to there, but Jonathan's dented Ford laid as an obstacle in his path. Not because he couldn't walk around it, but because the two people making out against the trunk were the same two people he preferred not to think about.

It wasn't unusual to see couples getting frisky after school; there were several other people smacking lips now that the teachers weren't forcing them apart. Hell, Steve had done it plenty of times before dating Nancy.

He had never done it *with her*, though. Not in public.

He can't remember Nancy ever kissing him quite like that.

His fingers came up to pinch the bridge of his nose. She was the best thing that had ever happened to him and now, as he saw her with another man, she was also the worst. How happy and in love she looked contrasted heavily with their time together. It made every moment that had brought out smile seem like shiny shit in a barrel because, fuck, was he the only one that had enjoyed their relationship? Was it really all just bullshit?

For once Steve tried recalling the details, but they continued to slip from his grasp. All he knew was at one point before the demon dogs, he had thought everything was perfect.

"The way I see it," a voice started from behind him, causing him to jump more than he would ever admit to. Fluffed hair and too tight clothes; it was Billy. Of course it was, Steve thought. The man's nose

could sniff out the worst moments to make an appearance for.

He glared at him for good measure.

"You've got two options here," Billy continued, ignoring him and taking out a cigarette. He lit it with practiced ease. "Either you fuck a bitch or you cry like one."

Steve blinked at that. "What are you on about, Hargrove?"

"To get over her." A nod was sent towards where Nancy stood wrapped in her new boyfriend's arms.

"I am," he immediately answered, turning his head away, "over her, that is."

"Yeah." Billy sucked in a puff and exhaled slowly, glancing at him with humored eyes. He propped himself against the brick wall behind them. "I don't think so."

"What makes you so sure?"

The laugh he barked out was sharp against Steve's ears. It made him want to punch him again. "You've been standing here watching her suck another dude's tongue for five minutes, you know that right? It's fucking creepy."

"Fuck."

"Yeah," Billy agreed with another chuckle. "Fuck."

There was nothing Steve could say to defend his actions. It wasn't like he could deny it when Billy and who knows who else had witnessed him mooning after his ex. He sighed.

"What makes you the expert?"

Billy raised an eyebrow at him. "You wanna be a bit more specific? But, let's assume the answer is, 'because I'm awesome.'"

"Hey, no. Expert on," he cringed and refused to make eye contact, finishing lamely with, "heartbreak."

Steve ducked his head as if that made it any better. It didn't.

Billy snorted. "I've fucked more birds than you, dipshit."

"So you're saying you get dumped a lot?"

"Not by any of the bitches around here. I'm the best man they've ever had." His smirk was too wide and too knowing, leaving little doubt of which ladies he was referring to.

It was Steve's turn to laugh. "You're just taking my leftovers."

"Yeah?" Billy asked. "And maybe I should take Nancy too." His lips stretched into a grin that spoke volumes more than his words and Steve panicked. His head snapped up.

"Woah now, look, just- Look over there!" Steve sputtered out, pointing wildly toward where he knew the horror was still happening. "She's in a relationship!"

Billy shrugged. "That hasn't stopped her before."

"No, we were," he huffed and knew this sounded idiotic, "on a break, or something. It's complicated. A lot of weird, shitty things happened and she just, well, you know. That."

"Yeah, uh huh." Billy watched as Steve's hands moved to cover his face. If he could hide himself from the world and his embarrassment with just his fingers, that would be fucking fantastic, but Steve still felt the breeze and an impending sense of doom regardless of his posture.

This was not how he thought his Thursday afternoon would be going. Rather than seeking breakup advice from a man who couldn't do relationships properly, he wanted be at home blaring Tina Turner love songs with a beer or three.

"You might want to come up with a better story than that," said Billy.

"It's the truth," he mumbled against his palm.

"That's a fucking shitty truth."

Steve sighed. "Isn't that how it usually is?"

"Good point," and with that, Billy took one last drag of his cigarette and smashed the butt into the wall. "Chin up, lover boy. Watch as you're about to owe me a favor."

Any question he might have had was cut short. Billy leaned forward, brushing by him, and stalked away with a swagger to his step that made Steve suspicious. He held his breath until he was certain he wasn't going to run up to Jonathan and do whatever psychos did to earn another's amity.

Billy flung himself into his Camaro and Steve assumed that would be the end of it. Anticlimactic and out of character, sure, but nothing in the last week had made sense to him. The apple, school, and now this conversation were all riddles he was too tired to solve.

His engine roared to life. Music snapped on and as the chorus revved up, Billy backed out of his parking space at a speed no one would recommend. His hand rested out his window, middle finger high and aimed directly at Steve. He returned the gesture out of habit.

With a snap the moment broke. Billy slammed his foot on the gas petal and screeched through one aisle to another, turning at last towards Nancy. Steve nearly shouted at her to run, that she was about to be roadkill, but he drove past the couple after only slowing to shout slander towards them. His eyes followed his car as it peeled away and disappeared behind the tree line.

When he turned back, Nancy was getting into Jonathan's passenger side and shutting the door behind her. The end to her romantic parking lot foray was a relief, one that was quickly soured by the realization that he did, in fact, owe Billy fucking Hargrove a favor.

This was easily becoming a tragedy. His desire to owe Billy anything was trumped by literally everything else. If this was on a bucket list, it would be at the bottom right after falling into the Upside Down and not having a herd of nerds there to save the day.

What would they say in this situation? Something about spidey-senses and tingling and Steve was angry enough to nod along to his

own imaginary comic book tagline.

Steve ventured towards his car with a scowl on his face and dread on his shoulders. The only solution was to skip school for the rest of his life. It would actually solve several of his problems, now that he thought about it.

It was tempting.

Really fucking tempting.

Instead Steve slid onto his seat, put the keys in the ignition, and pretended that the yellow lines on the road were all the many problems plaguing his life. He drove over each one, laughing.

It didn't help.